

Wyoming Department of Agriculture

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The Wyoming Department of Agriculture is dedicated to the promotion and enhancement of Wyoming's agriculture, natural resources and quality of life.



Dave Freudenthal, Governor
Jason Fearnelyhough, Director

May 11, 2009

Bearlodge Ranger District
PO Box 680
Sundance, WY 82729-0680
ATTN: Dennis Mauch

Dear Mr. Mauch:

Following are the Wyoming Department of Agriculture's (WDA) comments pertaining to the Scoping Notice for the proposed Inyan Kara Mountain Landscape Restoration Project in the Black Hills National Forest, Bearlodge Ranger District.

Our comments are specific to our mission: dedication to the promotion and enhancement of Wyoming's agriculture, natural resources, and quality of life. As this proposed project affects our agriculture industry, our natural resources, and the welfare of our citizens, it's important we be kept informed of proposed actions and decisions and that we continue to be provided the opportunity to express pertinent issues and concerns.

This project will impact grazing permittees, agriculture producers, landowners, and other citizens, as well as our natural resources, both in and near this 1,300-acre project area for the next 5 to 7 years. For these reasons, we are making the following comments.

With the increase of hazardous fuel loads throughout the west, it is necessary to decrease these fuel loads in wildland/urban interface areas. We support efforts to reduce fuel as well as restore the vegetative and age-class diversity of a fire-adapted ecosystem to forests in Wyoming. Thinning dense forest stands and applying prescribed fire will also open up the canopy to allow herbaceous vegetative growth and thus, allow livestock grazing to continue and improve. These management actions will increase Animal Unit Months and in turn supplement local economies. We encourage the use of managed livestock grazing in these areas at the first feasible opportunity.

Following are some specific individual effects upon livestock grazing that should be analyzed: introduction and spread of noxious weeds, impacts upon livestock grazing by prescribed burning, opened gates, and other detrimental social and economic impacts upon livestock operators and livestock management operations.

We strongly encourage Forest Service (FS) officials to continue to work with all livestock grazing permittees who may potentially be adversely affected by this project. Grazing on public lands is of significant value to agricultural producers as well as local communities. The impacts of this project could initially decrease revenues for grazing permittees and other agriculture producers.

We also request that the duration of time needed before grazing can occur on prescribed burn areas be evaluated on a case-by-case basis in cooperation with the grazing permittees, rather than

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adhering to a predetermined nationwide policy. Additionally, timely and successful reclamation and mitigation are critical to the re-introduction of livestock on treated areas and must be required.

Decisions in the proposed plan should allow FS officials, grazing permittees and private landowners the opportunity to work cooperatively. Flexibility to make the best site-specific, case-by-case decisions that are in the best interests of the affected resources and citizens throughout the life of this plan should also be addressed.

In conclusion, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on the scope of the proposed actions. We encourage continued attention to our concerns and we look forward to hearing about and being involved in proposed actions and decisions.

Sincerely,



Jason Fearneyhough
Acting Director

JF/jc

CC: Governor's Planning Office
Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts
Wyoming Board of Agriculture
Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation
Wyoming Game and Fish Department
Wyoming State Grazing Board
Wyoming Stock Growers Association
Wyoming Wool Growers Association